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DIVERSITY STATEMENT

As a member of a minority group, diversity has a central role in my career and in my life. I have experienced environments lacking diversity, but I have also experienced safe and welcoming environments where individuals are treated with respect, independently of their race, sexual orientation, gender identity and nationality. Based on these experiences, good and bad, I feel confident and prepared to lead and facilitate an open dialogue around the many sensitive subjects that involve diversity in the classroom and in my community.

Despite providing valuable diverse perspectives, members of minority groups everywhere are often silenced, and the constant self-doubt, prejudice and lack of opportunities they face are difficult to overcome. As an educator, it is my responsibility to create a receptive and safe space for the full range of students' ideas to be shared, personalities to be expressed and, above all, identities to be embraced. I achieve this environment in my classroom by taking special care to listen to my students and to elevate their voices, feelings and experiences inside and outside the classroom. It is important to me that students who belong to a minority group participate in the discussion, bringing their unique point of view and assuring that their presence is noticed and valued. When every student participates, every student benefits.

When preparing a curriculum, I include a large variety of scholarly materials from underrepresented groups. This has produced powerful results in my classroom, as the students who belong to privileged groups are exposed to high-level intellectual materials from a diverse group of thinkers, which provides them with new approaches and expanded views of the world of music. On the other hand, the students who belong to minority groups can feel represented and inspired by these authors' examples. It is my hope that these students feel welcome to pursue careers in music and that they know it is possible to be a musician from an underrepresented group.

As a performer, I actively pursue quality works to add to my repertoire that are by composers who do not belong to the majority group in classical music (composed by White men from Europe). I have created and performed programs wherein the majority of the composers are women, women/men from Latin America, or music by African-Brazilians. I have been fortunate enough to work closely with incredible performers from underrepresented groups with diverse nationalities, races, sexual orientations and genders. These interactions have shaped me as a musician, educator and, above all, as a well-rounded citizen. I try to bring insights from these experiences into the classroom to share with my students every day. As an instructor of clarinet, I encourage my students to perform pieces by underrepresented groups and to collaborate with a diverse group of people. I facilitate this enterprise by providing my students with the repertoire and tools to support them but also by encouraging them to think creatively about their repertoire and performance choices so they might try something out of their comfort zone.

In order to responsibly facilitate a fruitful discussion about diversity in the classroom, the instructor must be willing to hear contradictory perspectives and allow meaningful debate. In recent years, I have participated in many events that spark discussions around diversity that have been enlightening in this way. I have performed in events organized by the Latin community, Middle Eastern community and African American community. I have attended workshops at the University of Iowa, during which thoughtful conversations were presented regarding diversity in academia. I have twice attended the SphinxConnect conference organized by the Sphinx Organization, the goal of which is to bring together African American and Latinx musicians to network and discuss issues they encounter in classical music. I have participated in nonviolence protest in support of the rights of underrepresented groups in diverse areas, such as immigration, civil rights and safety. Above all, I stay open-minded in order to critically evaluate my own actions to learn and become a better ally to my students, my colleagues and my community members from all backgrounds.

As an instructor, it is not enough that we allow students from diverse backgrounds to participate in music; it is often necessary that we go the extra step to make it clear that they are not outsiders, that music is accessible to everyone. Recently, I taught a World Music class for a group of undergraduate students, ranging from freshmen to seniors. One of my students caught my attention, a Black Haitian immigrant, the first generation in higher education from his family, who came to the U.S. with his parents when he was a child. It did not take long for me to realize that he felt dislocated in the room, sometimes because he had difficulty expressing himself in English and sometimes because he was one of only three international students in my class. He seemed to think that he did not have enough knowledge to follow the content. To encourage him to participate more and be engaged, I began to have small talks with him before class to find out what type of music he liked and what his interests were. In these conversations, I discovered that he spoke Creole, French, and English, that he liked soccer and that he liked lots of different types of music. After that, whenever these interests came up in class, I would ask him to contribute his perspective. He gradually became more confident in sharing his thoughts. When I talked about the music of *Santeria*, he shared about Voodoo in Haiti and dispelled some myths that students were curious about it. His sharing enriched the class discussion, and without his insights, the course would have undoubtedly been less meaningful. He became very participative in the class, and at the end of semester he was one of the most vocal students, and his grade increased significantly from the midterm.

My strategy for addressing the needs of students from underrepresented groups produced positive results for him and for his classmates. I was sensitive enough to identify a cultural barrier and was pro-active enough to act on it. Everyone in the class benefits when the struggling minority students are encouraged to share their experiences. It would perhaps be easier to stick to a pre-rehearsed lecture, but it is far better to open up space for shared experience.